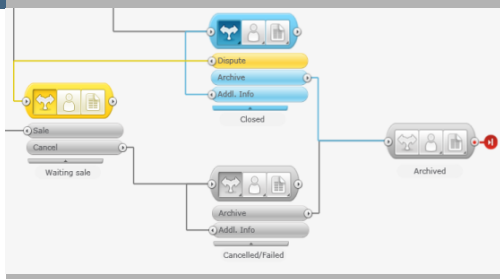
people ready



MyProcess

Firm Broadens Market Reach for Workflow Solution with Software-plus-Services Strategy

Story at a Glance

Samad Wahedi had a vision: Make it possible for average users to create and automate workflows using easy-to-use visual tools, rather than waiting for the IT department to do it for them. In 2007, Wahedi launched MyProcess, a company dedicated to bringing workflow to the masses. The company used Microsoft® development tools to create its SnapFlow application, and the Microsoft Silverlight™ browser plug-in for the product's user interface. By implementing its solution using a software-plus-services strategy—creating and storing workflows using a combination of on-premises and online software—MyProcess tremendously broadened its market reach. In addition, using Microsoft technologies trimmed development time by 40 percent.

Workflow for the Masses

As far back as 2001, Samad Wahedi began to notice the gradual migration of work to the Web. "I saw that people were doing more activities online, from banking to social networking," he says. "And when people start working online, they need tools for performing tasks in the new online environment." Wahedi knew that the traditional way for users to get software tools was through their company's IT department, which usually involves a long wait.

Wahedi decided that there was a business opportunity in creating software tools that average business users could use to create workflows, which are the key building blocks of most business processes. "There's a process associated with just about everything in business, from requesting vacation time to requisitioning a computer. I thought that users should have an easy way to design and automate process workflows themselves, rather than waiting for the IT department to build a specialized application," Wahedi says. In 2007, Wahedi launched MyProcess, a Portland, Oregon–based startup chartered with "bringing workflow to the masses." Today, Wahedi is Chief Executive Officer of MyProcess, and Gopinath Dhanakodi is the company's Vice President of Engineering.

SnapFlow: Fast, Online Workflow Creation

MyProcess used Windows® Workflow Foundation and the Microsoft® Silverlight™ browser plug-in to create a Web-based workflow design tool called SnapFlow. Business people use SnapFlow to build simple or complex workflows online using simple point-and-click and drag-and-drop actions. Users visit the SnapFlow Web site and simply click the "Start a Flow" button to begin building a workflow for any business

Customer Details
MyProcess
Phone: (503) 252-5000
Company size: 10 employees
Industry: Hosting—Software
Country or Region: United States
Segment: Small Business
Web site: www.snapflow.com

Customer Profile
MyProcess is a startup company based in Portland, Oregon, chartered with "bringing workflow to the masses." The company's SnapFlow workflow-creation platform enables average end users to create automated workflows themselves using intuitive graphical tools.

process, such as hiring a new person or purchasing supplies. Users can transfer completed SnapFlow workflows to a Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007 site for shared access.

Traditional methods of creating workflows using business process management solutions can take three to six months; creating workflows with SnapFlow takes just minutes or hours. Also, enterprise business process management software costs hundreds of thousands of dollars, making it "nearly impossible to realize a return on your investment [ROI]," Wahedi says. "Building workflows in SnapFlow provides an almost immediate ROI. Plus, nontechnical people can describe processes themselves, in a very visual way, so nothing gets lost in translation in working with technical folks." Another savings comes from companies not having to pay expensive software engineers to create and modify workflows.

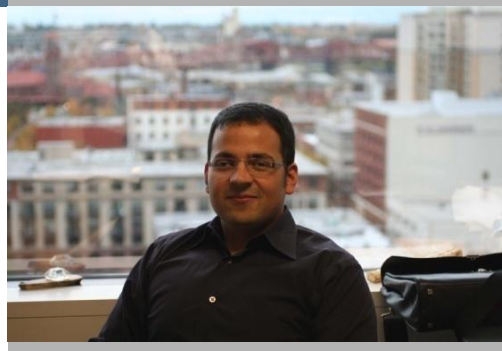
Broader Market Reach Using Software-plus-Services

Perhaps just as compelling as the capabilities of SnapFlow is the firm's implementation method—software is distributed over the Web. Users simply need to download a free copy of Microsoft Silverlight onto their desktop or portable computer, and then visit www.snapflow.com to "start a flow." All workflow data and the execution engine are stored in the MyProcess hosting infrastructure.

Deploying its solution using a software-plus-services approach enables MyProcess to minimize its customers' up-front investment and to maximize customer access. "Because our solution runs online, the entire world is a prospective customer," Wahedi says. "Anyone can run our software, anywhere. Traditionally, when customers want to try out a software program, they have to download and configure the program. It's a huge time and resource commitment, especially if they need to configure servers first. With software-plus-services, customers can try our software within minutes, rather than waiting a couple of weeks. Software-plus-services gives us the ability to reach a broad audience very inexpensively."

The software-plus-services approach also gives independent software vendors like MyProcess new possibilities for enriching their applications and broadening delivery models. "The combination of powerful client software—in this case, Silverlight—and a Web-based service provides a powerful new software development and distribution model," Wahedi says. "We can develop capabilities without concern for the back-end infrastructure required to run it because there is infinite processing power in the 'cloud.' But having powerful, locally installed software makes the user experience even better. We are now free to create solutions that take advantage of rich desktop software." With software-plus-services, MyProcess gets the richness of the desktop with the reach of the Web.

Wahedi's and Dhanakodi's vision has become reality. Using flexible Microsoft development and browser tools, and the cost-effective software-plus-services approach, anyone can start a workflow.



Executive Biography

Samad Wahedi, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of MyProcess, also founded Directquality, a successful managed-services company, prior to launching MyProcess. He held engineering executive positions at successful high-tech startups, such as Velosel, InsWeb, Live365.com, and Corillian, all engaged in designing and deploying online self-service technologies.

For Technical Decision Makers

Thousands of Dollars Saved Using Workflow Engine

In 2006, a year before launching MyProcess, Samad Wahedi began to tinker with workflow technologies and purchased the source code to a workflow engine created by another firm using the Microsoft .NET Framework. The custom code was difficult to work with, however, and building applications with it was time consuming. In 2007, Wahedi and Gopinath Dhanakodi, now Vice President of Engineering for MyProcess, revisited the workflow market and evaluated most of the commercial and open source workflow tools available.

The two ultimately decided to proceed with Windows Workflow Foundation 3.51, a Microsoft technology for building workflow-enabled applications, because of its rich features and also because Dhanakodi and fellow MyProcess developers had deep experience developing with the Microsoft .NET Framework. “We decided that using Windows Workflow Foundation and the Microsoft .NET Framework would save us tens of thousands of dollars in designing a custom workflow engine,” Dhanakodi says.

MyProcess made the .NET Framework the business-logic layer of its solution, Microsoft SQL Server® 2008 data management software the database layer, and Windows Workflow Foundation 3.51 the workflow engine. Windows Communication Foundation 3.5 provides the link between Silverlight and the SnapFlow server. All server products run on the Windows Server® 2003 Enterprise operating system. The team also used Microsoft Visual Studio® 2008 development system tools.

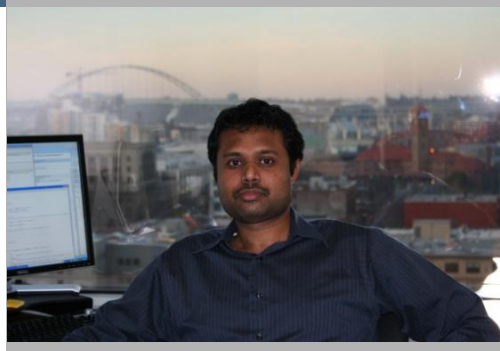
Faster Interface Development

When it was time to develop the interface that users would employ to design their workflows, MyProcess narrowed its development choices to Adobe Flash and Microsoft Silverlight, which Microsoft had just released in 2007. “Adobe Flash is widely used in many business applications, has a big user community, and has a fairly sophisticated feature set,” Dhanakodi says. “Silverlight was very new, and we were concerned that we wouldn’t find sufficient help in the development community.” So MyProcess committed to Adobe Flash as its user-interface development framework for SnapFlow.

A few weeks into prototype development, however, Dhanakodi and his team were disappointed with the progress they had made. The user interface looked clunky, and even simple changes took a long time to implement. Around the same time, MyProcess consulted SoftSource Consulting, a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner in Portland, to validate its technology and design decisions. SoftSource was an avid proponent of Silverlight and offered to demonstrate the capabilities of that software by replicating the Flash prototype that MyProcess had built. A few days later, SoftSource demonstrated how MyProcess could design its SnapFlow user interface using Silverlight, and the team was impressed.

“We decided that Silverlight was worth investigating in more detail,” Dhanakodi says. “Within a month, our team had made huge progress using Silverlight. Our team was able to learn the new tools and build a fairly sophisticated prototype without any support.”

Shaun McAravey, Cofounder and Chief Architect for SoftSource, says, “Windows



Executive Biography

Gopinath Dhanakodi, Vice President of Engineering at MyProcess, has 18 years of experience developing, architecting, and managing applications for a variety of startup companies, such as Ensequence and Rotor. Prior to joining MyProcess, Dhanakodi directed product development for a large offshore team.

Workflow Foundation and Silverlight are sufficiently approachable technologies that a competent technical team can get up to speed and produce a remarkable product in very little time. MyProcess really sped up its development using these tools."

To speed the SnapFlow user interface design, MyProcess used Microsoft Expression Blend™ design software, which provided an easy-to-use development environment and rich user experience. Microsoft Expression Blend is an interactive, WYSIWYG (what-you-see-is-what-you-get) front end for designing Extensible Application Markup Language (XAML)–based interfaces for Web and desktop applications.

Time-to-Market 40 Percent Faster

"Being able to take advantage of our developers' existing skill set to build more capability faster, sped up our development work by at least 40 percent," Dhanakodi says. "Plus, using Windows Workflow Foundation and Silverlight, we were able to produce a richer, more capable product sooner than we ever dreamed. It's also easy to extend our core foundation with minimal work."

Lessons Learned

- Identify a target user before beginning design.
- Build a foundational product first and obtain customer feedback before enhancing.
- Build time into the schedule for developers to learn new tools.

Software and Services

- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
  - Windows Server 2003 Enterprise
  - Microsoft SQL Server 2008
- Microsoft Office
  - Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007
- Microsoft Expression
  - Microsoft Expression Blend
- Technologies
  - Microsoft Silverlight
  - Microsoft .NET Framework 3.51
  - Windows Communication Foundation 3.5
  - Windows Workflow Foundation 3.51
- Solutions
  - Software-plus-services

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